

CENTRAL INTELLIGENCE AGENCY
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INTELLIGENCE MEMORANDUM

Hanoi's View of the War

SUMMARY

A review of all available evidence discloses no signs that Hanoi has any present intent to change the broad lines of its strategy in the war in Vietnam, either South or North. The Vietnamese still appear convinced that if they sustain the struggle they will in the long run prevail. Hanoi expects US forces to grow in size, however, and anticipates that by summer 1966 US military strength in South Vietnam will reach 300,000 and the weight of US air attacks will be greatly increased. At the same time, Hanoi is convinced that a continuation of its present intense effort in the South during the next year will cause mounting US casualties and growing political pressures against US involvement. The Vietnamese appear confident they can weather this "second phase" US buildup before making a basic review of their strategy.

1. A review of all available evidence strongly suggests that the pressures applied to North Vietnam thus far have not changed Hanoi's determination to prosecute the war in South Vietnam. These pressures include the US buildup in the South and its attendant successes, the present bombing program in the North, and the apparent intention of the US to double its combat strength and to expand the scope of the bombings. Hanoi, however, apparently believes that present US and GVN programs have not brought about any decisive change in the military situation and that contemplated programs can be prevented from doing so. In other words, it believes that in the long run it can still prevail.

2. Unless and until this belief is altered, it appears unlikely that there will be any change in Hanoi's posture. The course Hanoi will choose should it lose this self-assurance is uncertain, but the chances appear better than even that Communists would then opt for some form of retrenchment, either in a tacit standdown, or through negotiations.

3. Measures are under way to increase PAVN strength in South Vietnam, to mobilize the population in the North to build up air defenses throughout much of the DRV

to develop the infiltration routes in Laos, and to step up the infiltration of DRV regulars into South Vietnam. These all point to a determination to continue the conflict for a prolonged period of time. This determination is also reflected in Hanoi's propaganda, in its rebuff of various efforts to stimulate negotiations, and more convincingly, in the inability of the Soviet Union to bring about negotiations despite clear indications that it wants to but does not have the influence.

4. Hanoi apparently calculates that it can support sufficient forces in South Vietnam, and endure air attacks in North Vietnam, long enough to test US resolve to fight a bitter, unpopular, and inconclusive war on inhospitable terrain. Having balanced all the factors which would go into such a calculation--the present situation, the aid which it can expect from each of its major allies, US intentions and capabilities, GVN capabilities, PAVN/VC capabilities and the situation in the DRV itself--Hanoi has apparently concluded that it can carry on well into 1966 before such a decision must be reconsidered.

5. The Communist leaders must be concerned over the vulnerabilities of the overland lines of communication supporting the expanded PAVN forces in South Vietnam. They cannot be sanguine about the likelihood that more important and sensitive areas in the DRV will be bombed. They probably do not view with equanimity the fact that such an escalation will make it militarily necessary to rely increasingly on Chinese logistic support and even on Chinese garrison forces. We believe they have nagging doubts that the USSR has all the necessary resolve to see the war through and will be willing to supply all that is necessary to withstand major escalation; they probably are concerned that Moscow will attempt to bring about negotiations rather than accept the mounting risks of more direct Soviet involvement.

6. Such considerations are undoubtedly deeply affecting the Hanoi leadership, but they are not yet strong enough to make these leaders accept what must appear to them to be a very unpalatable alternative--negotiations. The men in Hanoi probably believe that the US at the present would settle for nothing less than a withdrawal of all PAVN forces and cadres from South Vietnam, a disarming of the VC, and a dismantling of the NFLSV apparatus. These are terms that they feel they need not accept, and they will fight on in the conviction that further prosecution of the war still holds the promise of gains.

Hanoi's View of the Current Military Situation in South Vietnam

7. There is probably a mixture of strong disappointment and of guarded optimism in the current assessment by the leaders in Hanoi of the fighting in South Vietnam. The relatively cheap and easy military victories which the Viet Cong forces were scoring in many cases through the spring of 1965 have become much more elusive since the buildup of the Allied ground forces this year. Adding immensely to the Communist difficulties has been the heavy increase in Allied air attacks against their base areas and forces in operation. The air attacks, along with the increased firepower and aggressiveness of the Allied troops, have caused heavy Communist casualties and a drop, although not a critical one, in insurgent morale.

8. On the other hand, the Communists still retain almost all the ground they held last spring. The Viet Cong main force units have continued to increase their numerical strength and over-all fighting capabilities despite the Allied buildup. Hanoi probably believes that while planned insurgent offensives may have been contained--at least for the time being--the Communist forces now have managed, by and large, to offset any ground advantage accruing to the Allies from the first phase of the buildup. The Viet Cong guerrillas, for example, have succeeded in tying down the bulk of the new Allied forces in static defense roles around key installations.

9. The Allied forces which have remained available to carry out offensive operations against Communist base areas have so far been denied access to most of the critically important training areas, supply dumps, and infiltration corridors in the central highlands. In the process, the Allied strike forces have on some occasions suffered substantial casualties. Continued control of the highlands by the Communists has made possible the infiltration and accommodation of some 10,000 regular North Vietnamese Army troops. This force, remaining intact and at least partially under direct DRV command, has supplied the Communists with a considerably more formidable and mobile reserve than was available to them in previous years.

Hanoi's View of the Soviet Position

10. There is some evidence that Hanoi is dissatisfied with the amount, if not the kind, of aid which it has received from Moscow. The many trips by members of the North Vietnamese leadership to Peking, Moscow, and to Eastern European capitals suggest that a continual effort must be made by Hanoi to gain either promises of further aid, or the fulfillment of promises already made.

11. In any event, there is no question that Hanoi remains distrustful of Soviet motivation. While Khrushchev was in power, Moscow had made it clear that it would not deliver even political and propaganda support for North Vietnam's war. Khrushchev's successors have

changed this, and military hardware aid now buttresses both political and propaganda support. In the eyes of Hanoi's leaders, however, Moscow's support must seem much less than all-out. The Soviets are still on good terms with the West; they show signs of preferring a negotiated settlement to the risks of a local war which might escalate to involve them; they are already constrained, and will become increasingly constrained, to keep their direct military manpower investment as limited as possible.

12. On the other hand, the North Vietnamese probably judge that the Soviet Union is locked in the struggle and, in view of the pretensions it still holds as leader of the Communist camp, cannot afford to step completely aside. While the aid that has been given thus far may be judged in Hanoi as insufficient, it is still considerable. The number of SAM sites continues to grow at a steady pace, and training of Vietnamese in the use of the sites is going forward. As more of these men are fully trained, Hanoi can expect the Soviets to increase the number of launchers and missiles in the country. The Soviet Union is publicly committed to continue its aid to North Vietnam; as long as it has pretensions to the leadership of world Communism, it can be expected, reluctantly or not, to supply that aid.

13. This aid is important, but it is not of vital importance. It has not yet been of sufficient quantity nor quality to give Moscow overriding influence in Hanoi. The North Vietnamese still are the focal point--when they decide to move toward retrenchment, they will expect to find Moscow of considerable help as an intermediary. Until they do, however, they probably feel confident that Moscow will not undercut them.

Hanoi's View of the Chinese Position

14. The North Vietnamese leaders probably also view their other Communist ally with mixed feelings. The Chinese have supplied large quantities of arms for the Viet Cong and the PAVN, excoriating Hanoi's enemies and maintaining a militant posture which poses a constant threat of intervention.

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15. On the other hand, Hanoi is aware that if Soviet willingness to provide significant aid is limited, the Chinese ability to provide such aid is also limited. The Chinese are so insistent on the validity of their theory of "national liberation wars" that they are willing to see the North Vietnamese and the Viet Cong carry on the struggle against overwhelming power for 20 or 30 years. They have not, however, shown an equal willingness to become involved in the fight directly.

16. Hanoi is probably reluctant to accept the kind of military aid that the Chinese can offer in large quantities, i.e., Chinese troops stationed in North Vietnam to release more of the North Vietnamese for combat in the South. Unless the North Vietnamese regime itself were threatened, acceptance of large numbers of Chinese troops in North Vietnam would appear to Hanoi an open invitation to the Chinese to acquire overwhelming influence in North Vietnam, thus risking a certain loss for an uncertain gain.

17. In addition, the Chinese intransigence toward the Soviet Union is so great that Peking is unwilling to join Moscow in any meaningful cooperation in aid of North Vietnam. There is good evidence, in fact, that the Chinese have obstructed the shipment of aid to Hanoi from the Soviet Union. The North Vietnamese have indicated that the Sino-DRV relationship has been affected by this unwillingness to put aside what must seem to Hanoi to be academic squabbling in the face of the increasing threat to the DRV.

18. Thus, while the Chinese are a powerful ally at this moment and their views are given considerable weight in Hanoi, these views do not outweigh all others. If the North Vietnamese decide on other grounds to fight on, they can count on Chinese support. If the other factors seem to them of greater weight, the Chinese would have to accept Hanoi's decision or increase the risk of a war with the US from which the USSR would almost certainly abstain.

Hanoi's Estimate of US Military Intentions

19. The propagandists in the DRV have made it clear that Hanoi expects the US will now follow its initial buildup in South Vietnam with a second phase

augmentation. DRV statements indicate that the North Vietnamese expect this second-round buildup to bring US ground force strength in South Vietnam to somewhat over 300,000 men, about twice as many as are now in place. The new increments in US ground strength, DRV propaganda predicts, will be largely heliborne strike units which will add to the offensive side of Allied power.

20. The Communists probably believe that it will take the US from six to nine months to double its ground combat strength in South Vietnam. This would include the time needed for assembling, equipping, training, and dispatching the US troops. It would also include a period of acclimatization and of light operations before commitment to major offensive tasks. In this perspective, Hanoi probably believes it has until the late summer or the fall of 1966 to prepare to meet the full force of the second-phase US buildup.

21. Allied tactical air support can be stepped up in a considerably shorter period of time, and has, in fact, already intensified considerably. To mitigate the air threat, the insurgents have speeded up their program to entrench and protect vital base installations; they are continuing, apparently as fast as possible, to augment their automatic weapons capability against aircraft; in combat they are seeking to fight at such close quarters that US air power must be withheld.

22. The Communists probably continue to believe, however, based on their experience in Korea, against the French in Vietnam, and in the fighting against Saigon since 1961, that air power will not be decisive to the military outcome in South Vietnam. In their judgment the conclusive factor, given the geography and natural cover there, will be the use of ground forces.

Other Pressures on Hanoi

23. Aside from the expected new buildup of Allied troops in the South, the chief factor which will influence Hanoi's decisions on future strategy in the war is the effect of the US air attacks on the DRV. The air strikes have definitely disrupted agricultural and industrial production, and have greatly hampered transportation. It is probable that Hanoi is already finding the logistic support of the Viet Cong more difficult as

a result of the strikes. The regime is also experiencing growing problems in the proper allocation of manpower and resources to cope with the effects of the raids. Hanoi fully expects, moreover, that the attacks will be extended to all worthwhile military and economic targets in the Hanoi-Haiphong area, and that the US will probably attempt to block all North Vietnamese communications links abroad, including the seaports.

24. It does not appear, however, that the air attacks, even if extended and increased, will be a conclusive factor within the next six to nine months in determining North Vietnamese policy on the war in South Vietnam. The North Vietnamese have so far been able to continue supplying their forces in South Vietnam despite disruption of transportation links by bombing. The North Vietnamese economy is basically simple; what industrial complexes remain to be attacked are not critical to the war effort in the South.

25. The impact of the raids on the thinking of the regime in Hanoi is directly related to the status of the fighting in South Vietnam. So long as the insurgents are not clearly losing the battle there, Hanoi will probably be resolute in its determination to weather the air assaults on the DRV.

26. By continuing to infiltrate men and materiel at a substantial pace in 1966, Hanoi apparently hopes, at the minimum, to create a stalemate in the fighting in South Vietnam before the pressures of the bombing on the North and the interdiction of supply lines to the South become too costly to bear. The regime probably hopes that if it can prove to the US that a second phase commitment of American combat troops will not conclusively turn the tide, US resolve will weaken and Washington will be ready to make some major concessions in its policy. Hanoi is doubtless counting on heavy US casualties to spur strong domestic opposition to American policy. The North Vietnamese will also be hoping for a new coup in Saigon or some other unforeseeable development to weaken the US position.

27. If the Communist forces can gain a stalemate in the South in which substantial pressures are working on Washington to modify US policy on Vietnam, Hanoi may finally prove interested in negotiations on the war on the basis of joint concessions. Such a situation would

be similar to that which existed in 1954, when the North Vietnamese were negotiating from a position of strength with the French, while at the same time they had gone about as far as they could go in the military sphere without a long breathing spell.

28. If Hanoi opted for a negotiated settlement at that point, it would be seeking at the minimum to gain a guaranteed territorial foothold for the Communists in South Vietnam, along with the participation of the Viet Cong in a coalition government. Such a settlement would permit the Communists to build up their strength for a new effort in the future to complete their take-over in the South. By way of concessions, they would probably be willing to abandon their insistence that the postwar political arrangements in the South follow only the program of the National Liberation Front. They would probably also be willing to agree to another international commission to oversee the settlement, although they would not accept a commission with fully adequate powers to police or enforce the agreement.

29. If the US buildup in South Vietnam over the next year is successful in turning the course of the fighting decisively against the insurgents, the chances appear better than even that the Communists would opt for retrenchment rather than for escalation. Retrenchment would be more likely to take the form of a de facto termination of the fighting than a negotiated settlement. The DRV would probably estimate that a withdrawal of the bulk of Communist forces from the South, even if conducted clandestinely, would result in a cessation of US military pressure on North Vietnam. The Communists would, of course, attempt to maintain an underground apparatus in the South in the hope that the insurgency could be started anew after a period of rebuilding and reorganization.

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